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August 18, 2000, Friday

SECTION: FINANCIAL NEWS

DISTRIBUTION: TO BUSINESS, HOME AND GARDEN AND TECHNOLOGY EDITORS

LENGTH: 1099 words

HEADLINE: Planetgarden.com and Southern Living Announce Strategic Partnership Agreement;
Partnership to Create Unrivaled Content and Cross-Marketing Opportunities

DATELINE: ATLANTA, Aug. 18

BODY:

Planetgarden.com, positioned to become the premier lawn and garden professional and consumer portal for on-line advice, information, products, and services, and Southern Living, one of the nation's leading lifestyle and gardening publications and the flagship of the Southern Progress Corporation family, today announced a strategic partnership, which includes a future possible sale of a minority interest in Planetgarden.com to Southern Progress, a subsidiary of Time Inc. The two companies have signed a long-term agreement that will:

Broaden Planetgarden.com's content, offering users access to Southern Living's vast collection of gardening content and images through a co-branded Southern Living site within Planetgarden.com. Founded in 1966, Southern Living has established itself as a force in gardening and Southern lifestyle and culture.

Create numerous cross-marketing opportunities for both companies, including giving Planetgarden.com access to Southern Progress Corp.'s multi-million person database; a 4th quarter co-branded support of the website launch within the pages of Southern Living, Coastal Living and Southern Accents; a quarterly co-branded Southern Gardening Calendar with Southern Living; revenue-sharing; exclusive on-line sponsorship of Southern Living Idea Houses and Gardening Schools, with the possibility of creating virtual Idea Houses and Schools; and other activities such as a co-branded Southern Living channel within Planetgarden.com, TV show development, sweepstakes, and a presence in the November introduction of Hot Dots, Southern Progress' new magazine devoted to shopping on the Internet.

Explore the development of business-to-business offerings, including The Nursery Grapevine, a web-enabled hotline for nurseries nationwide which will offer trend identification, new business leads, financial services and address skilled labor issues and The Professional Landscape Network, a network that will identify and certify **landscape** companies and architects in local geographic markets.

Consumers will then have the option of locating and referencing these professionals, as well as hiring their services and designing their landscapes via the internet.

"Southern Living is the premier brand and vehicle when it comes to communicating with and reaching the gardening audience," said Charles Marto, President and CEO of Planetgarden.com. "Our philosophy of choosing partners is simple. We will only align with companies that have trusted brands, content, and products, so that together we can grow the lawn and garden category, connect the disparate parts and improve the success of professionals, industry partners and consumers. Southern Living certainly has qualified gardeners and conditioned customers."

The lawn and garden market in the U.S. is estimated to be \$160 billion annually and the fragmentation of this market and the opportunity it represents is a key factor behind Southern Living's foray into the Internet.

"This is a significant decision for Southern Living," said Scott Sheppard, Executive Vice President for Southern Progress Corp. "Our partnership with Planetgarden.com is about leveraging and linking on-line and off-line assets together to create success for our readers, customers, consumers and professionals alike. The Internet is about empowerment and we chose Planetgarden.com because we believe they are creating and developing the ultimate lawn and garden portal."

Planetgarden.com has launched its content site and is slated for a commerce launch in early August with the business-to-business offerings to follow. Its exclusive partnership with the Atlanta-based Pike Family Nurseries, the nation's largest independent nursery chain, gives Planetgarden.com the traditional retail buying power, prices, and margins that many e-tailers cannot achieve. The 42-year history of Pike Family Nurseries and their access to many of the nation's

most prestigious growers and manufacturers including Hines Nurseries, Pennington Seeds, Flowerwood (grower of the famous Encore Azalea), Imperial Nurseries, Van Bloem Bulbs and many others, will allow consumers a selection of more than 20,000 products. Many of these 20,000 product offerings will be exclusive to Planetgarden.com.

"The Pike Family and Pike Family Nurseries chose to become a founder of Planetgarden.com because we wanted to share our 42 years of experience and relationships with gardeners throughout the world. We wanted to be able to offer the highest quality products, the most relevant gardening information, the most convenience and the best user experience on the internet. We are confident that Planetgarden.com will be able to provide what it will take to make gardeners successful," said Randy Pike, executive vice president of Pike Family Nurseries.

"By leveraging the Pike customer base, merchandising the Pike Family Nursery locations and taking advantage of the millions of gardeners who visit Pike Family Nurseries every year, Pike and Planetgarden.com will execute a "bricks and clicks" strategy to achieve a path to profitability. We know the possibilities are endless, our customers, investors and the major growers are excited and we know this opportunity doesn't exist in our industry or space right now. Plus, gardening is the most popular - and growing - lifestyle activity in the country."

About Planetgarden.com

Planetgarden.com is positioned to become the nation's leading lawn and garden portal offering, supporting and connecting professionals, industry partners and consumers with superior product selection, pricing and information. Its personalized delivery of regionalized gardening information and other professional services complement the best available on-line selection of plants and hard goods. Planetgarden.com is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia and can be accessed at <http://www.Planetgarden.com>.

About Southern Living

Southern Living is part of Southern Progress Corporation, which also includes the 114-year old Progressive Farmer, Cooking Light, Coastal Living, Southern Accents, Hot Dots, and Oxmoor House books. Southern Living has a paid circulation of more than 2.5 million and monthly readership of 12.6 million. Southern Progress Corp. is a subsidiary of Time Inc.

SOURCE Planetgarden.com

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April 11, 2000, Tuesday

SECTION: FINANCIAL NEWS

DISTRIBUTION: Attention Business/Technology Editors

LENGTH: 961 words

HEADLINE: HomeProject.com Expands into Business-to-Business Market by Joining Forces with Garden Graphics to Link Professional **Landscape** Designers with Customers Online

DATELINE: TORONTO, April 11

BODY:

HomeProject.com Inc. (CDN:HPCI), the e-business marketplace for home improvement projects, today announced that it has signed an agreement with Garden Graphics, the worldwide value-added reseller of DynaScape, a leading **professional landscaping design software**, to link professional **designers** and contractors with **landscaping** and gardening enthusiasts online.

At the HomeProject.com Web site (www.homeproject.com), consumers will be able to **create a landscape design and submit it online** to solicit bids from professional garden designers, **landscape** architects and contractors. Under the agreement announced today, these professionals can then use DynaScape software, available from Garden Graphics and originally developed by Ditek Software Corp., (now HomeProject.com) to develop an accurate plan and cost estimate. HomeProject.com's online **landscaping** templates were designed to work seamlessly with the DynaScape software, significantly facilitating the bidding process for professionals using the software.

"HomeProject.com's agreement with Garden Graphics is the first step in expanding our reach into the lucrative business-to-business market," said Amnon Zohar, president and CEO of HomeProject.com Inc. "**Landscape** designers employing DynaScape in the bids process will be at a significant advantage for providing homeowners with additional ideas, accurate cost estimates and professional design outputs. HomeProject.com's partnership with Garden Graphics creates a unique networking capability for gardening professionals to collaborate with their customers in creating their dream gardens."

The partnership opens new revenue streams for HomeProject.com, which will collect royalties from Garden Graphics' sales of DynaScape, in addition to collecting revenues from contractors as the facilitator of the bidding process.

Garden Graphics will promote HomeProject.com in all its seminars, promotional materials and advertising in national U.S. lawn and **landscape** magazines. Garden Graphics' network of designers will also create a Customer Care package for HomeProject.com consumers, which includes instructions on how to care for the new plants in their gardens.

"HomeProject.com is a terrific solution for homeowners looking for innovative ways to create their dream homes and gardens, and we are pleased to be working with them," said Mike Bosch, president of Garden Graphics. "This is a natural partnership which will benefit both companies, but more importantly will set a new standard of collaboration between consumers and professionals

in the **landscaping** industry."

About Garden Graphics

Garden Graphics Inc. first began operations as a custom **Landscape** Design firm serving the Golden Horseshoe area surrounding the city of Toronto. A keen interest in pursuing fast, accurate and professional software for **landscape** design and quotations led Garden Graphics to conclude that the right product wasn't yet on the market. Recognizing that the demand existed, Garden Graphics decided to build a better solution. Garden Graphics approached, and ultimately, formed strategic partnerships with HomeProject.com's parent company Ditek Software and Coyote Software to bring DynaSCAPE CAD design software and Quote Scapes data management and quotation software to the market. Garden Graphics Inc. subsequently sought to focus its marketing potential by seeking a further investment by Coyote Software. Garden Graphics Inc. is working with other new partners to provide the latest and best tools for the design, quotation, presentation and management of **landscape** design concepts.

About HomeProject.com

HomeProject.com is an Internet services company focused on the \$180 billion home and garden improvement market. Its Web site (www.homeproject.com) will offer homeowners step-by-step guidance on how to plan, design, visualize and successfully complete home improvement projects. The site also will provide expert advice coupled with materials sourcing, delivery and e-commerce. HomeProject.com's graphics, design and modeling applications will underpin the site's features. Leveraging strategic partnerships with companies including MGI Software Corp., IBM, and others, HomeProject.com will help homeowners transform their visual ideas into reality. HomeProject.com (formerly Ditek Software) is a public company trading on the Canadian Dealing Network under the symbol "HPCI". It has 17,735,709 outstanding shares and an additional 1,956,793 shares issuable upon the exercise of outstanding special warrants to MGI Software Corp.

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This news release may contain forward-looking statements relating to the future performance of HomeProject.com. Forward-looking statements are subject to certain risks and uncertainties, and actual results may differ materially. Forward-looking statements are based on management's beliefs and opinions at the time the statements are made, and the Company does not undertake any obligations to update forward-looking statements should circumstances or management's beliefs or opinions change.

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LOAD-DATE: April 12, 2000

March 16, 2000, Thursday

SECTION: FINANCIAL NEWS

DISTRIBUTION: TO BUSINESS, HOME AND GARDEN AND TECHNOLOGY EDITORS

LENGTH: 1177 words

HEADLINE: Mother Nature Meets Motherboard;
SierraHome's Complete LandDesigner 3D Design Collection Brings **Landscape** Planning and Visualization Tools to the Home Computer

DATELINE: BELLEVUE, Wash., March 16

BODY:

SierraHome(TM) offers gardening assistance to Mother Nature this spring with the release of LandDesigner(R) 3D Design Collection 6.0 for computer gardening and landscaping. With expanded sample garden and landscaping designs, over 6,000 selections of plant life and outdoor accessories and the ability to order gardening supplies online, gardeners of every level will be able to visualize, plan and build their gardens before the bulbs begin to peak.

"Gardening is one of the top hobbies in America, yet most gardeners don't realize they can take their favorite hobby to new heights with their home computer," said Anne Boswell, vice president of marketing for SierraHome.

"SierraHome is excited to offer gardening and landscaping enthusiasts everywhere a software program such as Complete LandDesigner to plan, design, visualize growth and problem-solve before putting a shovel in the ground."

Complete LandDesigner, the 1-selling gardening software product on the market in 1999*, has been widely heralded as the leading program by garden writers and software reviewers nationwide. Created with gardeners' needs in mind, SierraHome's LandDesigner is a collection of powerful software tools supported by helpful videos and tutorials to make landscaping easy and fun.

Enhancements to Complete LandDesigner 3D Design Collection 6.0 include:

- Additional sample garden and landscaping designs including Feng Shui, Italian, English, Southwestern, water, rose, herb and mystical gardens
- Enhanced plant and object search functions
- Ability to print out and email high-quality 3D design snapshots
- Improved design functionality when working with and around landscape hills, mounds and depressions
- An upgraded problem-solving design guide
- Partnership with Garden.com(TM) for users to order garden supplies online
- New freehand drawing tools for incorporating customized flowerbeds and driveways into designs
- Traditional LandDesigner features include: Seasonal Changes, Growth Over Time, Shadow Caster, WalkAbout(TM), a 3D-viewing tool and SierraHome's own gardening Web site: www.gardening.com.

Six programs are included in the new Complete LandDesigner 3D Design Collection 6.0: LandDesigner 3D 6.0, Photo Garden Designer, Garden Encyclopedia, 3D Deck, The Ortho(R) Home Gardener's Problem Solver and Personal Garden Planner. No other gardening suite combines project-based landscaping, garden research and deck design software.

Landscape Design Tools:

LandDesigner 3D 6.0 allows computer users of any skill level to design their ideal landscapes, drawing from a selection of 6,000 plants, trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and outdoor accessories, and stroll through the final design in photo-

realistic 3D. In addition, step-by-step wizards helps users customize **landscapes** to reflect a lot shape including ground slopes, hills, mounds, depressions and house-positions. The end **design** can then be easily shared with **landscaping** professionals and/or friends through print-outs, email or the **Internet**.

Gardeners will enjoy the photo-realistic fun of Photo Garden Designer. Starting with a scanned photo of their yard, gardeners can quickly and easily see how adding shrubs, brick walkways, tile roofs and other accessories can beautify their property before even breaking ground.

3D Deck allows users to design single- or multi-level decks and view them in 3D alone or within the garden plan. With 3D Deck, users can also view an animated deck building sequence from the ground up. Simply click and drag the outline of the deck and 3D Deck calculates how the boards should be cut, placed and even compiles a complete materials shopping list for the design.

Resources for Gardeners:

The Ortho Home Gardener's Problem Solver helps gardeners identify the pests and diseases blighting their garden and offers solutions. Widely recognized as the premier authority in garden care, Ortho draws both organic and chemical solutions from an extensive database of nearly 700 gardening problems.

Garden Encyclopedia is a phenomenal resource with thousands of full-color photos of plants, trees and shrubs. A one-button search feature allows users to quickly find and hear the pronunciations of either common or botanical plant names, determine which plants attract hummingbirds or butterflies or search for particular attributes such as flower color, climate zone, bloom season or sun requirements. Gardeners can even rule out poisonous plants for more kid- and/or animal-friendly gardens.

Gardeners will get organized and stay one step ahead of outdoor chores with the Personal Garden Planner. Stationed on the desktop, users can plan for various **landscaping** tasks with a built-in, customizable calendar.

Garden.com(TM)

SierraHome has partnered with Garden.com to offer users a \$10 gift certificate towards their first garden supply purchase at Garden.com.

Pricing, Availability and System Requirements

Complete LandDesigner 3D Design Collection is available on CD-ROM for Windows 95/98/2000 at an estimated street price of \$69.95. Complete LandDesigner 3D Design Collection is available at local software retailers, online at www.sierrahomexigner.com 3D Design Collection is part of SierraHome, Sierra's home productivity division. SierraHome has recently expanded, making it one of the most diverse publishers of home productivity software titles in the industry. SierraHome publishes top-selling product lines in categories including home publishing, genealogy, cooking, gardening, home design, digital imaging, personal improvement and Web page design.

Sierra On-Line, Inc., <http://www.sierra.com/>, is one of the original developers and largest worldwide publishers of interactive entertainment and productivity software. Sierra is a division of Havas Interactive, a global leader in interactive content, and is one of the world's largest publishers of education, entertainment and home productivity software. Its divisions, Blizzard(R), Coktel, Knowledge Adventure(R), Sierra(TM) and WON.net(TM) are famous for releasing critically acclaimed and award winning titles. Havas has operations in the U.S. and in Europe and is a subsidiary of the French publishing house Havas, part of Vivendi Communications.

NOTE Ortho is a registered trademark of The Scotts Company. Garden.com is a registered trademark of Garden.com, Inc.

Sierra press releases are available on the Internet, via SierraWeb at <http://www.sierra.com>.

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URL: <http://www.prnewswire.com>

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Business Wire

September 29, 1998, Tuesday

DISTRIBUTION: Business Editors/High Tech Writers

LENGTH: 817 words

HEADLINE: VisApp Develops cMyVision: New Interactive, Home Design, E-Commerce Solution

DATELINE: KANSAS CITY, Mo.

BODY:

Sept. 29, 1998--

Home, remodeling and **landscape** industry retailers and manufacturers can build consumer base with VisApp's new visualization Web site

Visual Applications, Inc. (VisApp), a leading publisher of personal visualization technology, today announced cMyVision, an interactive home design Web site and application, to launch Q1 1999. cMyVision gives consumers the power to design home projects by visualizing a new look, and offers the home, remodeling and **landscape industry** a unique opportunity to reach target audiences online. Using personal, or cMyVision-supplied, photos of a house (interior or exterior) or garden as a decorating palate, visitors can experimentally design their homes with actual brand name windows, doors, furniture, etc. Drawing on thousands of product images, users can explore countless options to create photorealistic pictures of completed projects. As a result, each time cMyVision visitors turn to the site to solve a decorating dilemma, retailers and manufacturers have a unique opportunity to showcase their products as a solution. "Joe Handyman doesn't have to try to imagine what your green shutters will look like on the outside of his house. He can go to cMyVision, virtually hang them on a scanned-in photo of his home, print it out and go show Mrs. Handyman," said Bobbie Dreis-Ayers, president and founder of Visual Applications, Inc. "cMyVision helps consumers visualize answers to their home design questions and then adds the convenience of online shopping and ordering to build a complete one-stop solution," said Dreis-Ayers. "It's all there.

Visitors go, try, then buy." A smooth integration of elements helps cMyVision conquer current deficiencies in online merchandising on a number of levels. "It's interactive and personalized, creating a one-on-one shopping experience between seller and shopper. By taking a product into the consumer's home, letting them play and experiment with it, merchants help overcome consumer lack of faith in flat, stale online product images. cMyVision also recreates the enjoyable experience of trying on, or trying out, an item. The result is a much-needed e-commerce solution for marketers," she said. The revolutionary technology behind cMyVision includes a back-end application, that when used in conjunction with the Internet, forms a powerful **image selection and cataloging tool**. Merchants can easily link with their existing image library to build a complete product offering on cMyVision. The cMyVision Web site, which will initially focus on the home remodeling/furnishings arena, but will ultimately expand to include apparel, also includes a free Web-enabled software application scheduled for release in Q1 1999. The cMyVision application will be available for download from the cMyVision Web site and enables users to use drag and drop, scale, and save features similar to those used in VisApp's established consumer visualization software products: Imagine Your Dream Home(R), Imagine Your Exterior Remodeling(R), Imagine Your **Landscape**(R), Imagine Your Deck, Pool and Hot Tub(R) and Imagine Your Interior Design.(R)

The next step in visualization: Internet and e-commerce

cMyVision represents the next step in VisApp's visualization product offerings. It brings to the **Internet** the success of Imagine Your Complete Home & **Landscape** -- a popular **VisApp home design** software series exclusively licensed to Macmillan Digital USA in August 1998, and VisualPhile(R) -- VisApp's professional design series. "We've expanded the power of Imagine and VisualPhile to create the next generation of home design tools and online sales and merchandising solutions," said Dreis-Ayers. "The online shopping market is expected to multiply exponentially in the

next few years, creating opportunities that retailers cannot afford to ignore. VisApp recognizes this and will continue to offer innovative solutions."

About VisApp

Visual Applications, Inc. (VisApp), headquartered in North Kansas City, Mo., is a leading manufacturer of personal visualization technology. VisApp was founded in 1990 with the vision of offering innovative, interactive and easy-to-use visualization solutions for use in home design and e-commerce. For more information about VisApp visit the company's Web site at www.visapp.com.

For more information about cMyVision, contact Visual Applications, Inc., at (800) 798-4727. For more information about partnering with Visual Applications, Inc., contact Barry Friedman at (340) 777-7483, or Allan Rinkus at (626) 793-4764.

CONTACT: The Terpin Group, New York
Angela Toda, 212/473-7500 ext. 13
atodafterpin.com

Today's News On The Net - Business Wire's full file on the Internet

with Hyperlinks to your home page.

URL: <http://www.businesswire.com>

LOAD-DATE: September 30, 1998

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Canada NewsWire

April 14, 1997, Monday

SECTION: Financial News

LENGTH: 757 words

HEADLINE: NEW **LANDSCAPE** DESIGN PACKAGE FROM SOFTQUAD'S ALPHA SOFTWARE DIVISION
INCLUDES FREE PHOTO SCAN SERVICE, WEB IMAGE DOWNLOADS

DATELINE: Complete **Landscape** Designer Offers Botanical Database That Turns Do-It-Yourselfers Into Horticultural
Experts

BURLINGTON, Mass., April 14

BODY:

Alpha Software, a division of SoftQuad International (Nasdaq: SWEBF; Toronto: SKI), today announced Complete **Landscape Designer**, a feature-rich software package that combines ease-of-use and photo-quality **landscape** design capabilities with a comprehensive library of plants and structures.

Complete **Landscape** Designer enables users to start with an actual photo of their yard, then drag-and-drop images of plants and objects to instantly visualize the results. Two free photo scans from Alpha Software are included with the program.

Featuring the most detailed database available in any **landscape** design program, Complete **Landscape** Designer eliminates guesswork by providing comprehensive botanical information on more than 500 plants. Users can search for the desired plant by color, soil type needed, climate zone, Latin name, blooming season, and more. Users can also add to the library by either scanning in photos of their own, or by downloading free additional images of plants and objects from Alpha Software's **Web site** (<http://www.alphasoftware.com>).

"With Complete **Landscape Designer**, you don't need any special PC or gardening hardware -- all you really need is your imagination," said Howard March, Vice President of Alpha Software. "You don't have to spend time measuring every flowerbed and patch of grass -- just drag and drop new flowering plants, fences and walks right onto a picture of your own yard. From free photo scans to information on plants appropriate for your soil and location, Complete **Landscape** Designer provides all of the support you need to prove that you really do have a green thumb."

Powerful outline and fill functions allow users to design a brick path or flagstone patio by simply outlining and filling in an area on the scanned photo image. Walls, fences, fountains, gazebos and other decorative objects and structures also can be included. Images of trees and shrubs can be re-sized, making it easy to visualize plant growth from year to year and helping to avoid expensive **landscaping mistakes**.

National Gardening Magazine praised Complete **Landscape** Designer, noting that it "gives you an opportunity to see exactly how your garden would appear by using snapshots of your own yard." Most other **landscape** programs use cartoon-like graphics to simulate the yard and plants.

With a suggested retail price of \$49.95, Complete **Landscape** Designer is now available at selected retailers, including CompUSA, Computer City, Best

Buy, MicroCenter, EB, Staples, Office Depot, Office Max, Fry's and Egghead. Bundled with the program, which runs under Windows 95 and Windows NT, is a free seed packet and catalog from Burpee.

About SoftQuad

SoftQuad is the leading provider of multi-platform, standards-based Knowledge Publishing applications that enhance work in structured document publishing and structured databases. SoftQuad's Alpha Software unit develops, markets and supports a diverse array of quality software titles for consumers and small business. SoftQuad is a founding member and active participant in the World Wide Web Consortium, the Internet Engineering Task Force and Editorial Review Boards. Based in Toronto, Canada, SoftQuad International employs more than 150 people with additional sales offices across North America, and European operations based in London, with offices in Paris and Munich.

Electronic access to SoftQuad's press materials can be accessed at <http://www.softquad.com/press/> and through Newsdesk International at <http://www.newsdesk.com> or 1-800-636-6092.

Forward-looking statements in this release are made pursuant to the safe harbor provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Investors are cautioned that all forward-looking statements involve risk and uncertainties, including without limitation risks of intellectual property rights and litigation, risks in technology development and commercialization, risks in product development and market acceptance of and demand for the Company's products, risks of downturns in economic conditions generally, risks associated with competition and competitive pricing pressures, risks associated with foreign sales, risks associated with the sell through of products in the sales channels, risks associated with customer concentration and other risks detailed in the Company's filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

-30-

For further information: Tracey Graham of Alpha Software, (617) 229-2924, ext. 215 or tgraham@alphasoftware.com, or Ken Greenberg of Edge Communications, Inc., (818) 591-1173 or keng@jdt.net, or Investor Relations: Dave Gurney, Chief Executive Officer of SoftQuad, (416) 544-9000 or investor@sq.com or [http:](http://)

LN-ORG: COMPLETE LANDSCAPE (96%);

LOAD-DATE: April 14, 1997

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The New York Times

December 22, 1996, Sunday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section 9; Page 1; Column 2; Real Estate Desk

LENGTH: 3464 words

HEADLINE: A Mouse in the House? Click Here

BYLINE: By JAY ROMANO

BODY:

WHEN Shaul and Laurie Dover decided it was time to build their dream house, they wanted to be sure the dream would be theirs and not someone else's. Just as important, Mr. and Mrs. Dover also wanted to do their dreaming on their own time, and not while paying an hourly fee in an architect's office.

So Mr. Dover, a New York City clothing manufacturer modestly talented with computers, began scouring the software superstores for an architectural design program easy enough to learn in somewhat less than an average lifetime, yet sophisticated enough to allow him to feel he was working with something other than a high-priced video game.

Like many computer enthusiasts who are looking for just the right program to fit their special needs, Mr. Dover was compelled to buy first and tinker later.

"I spent a lot of time trying to figure out which programs were the best," Mr. Dover said. "And I wasted some money in the process."

With the number of programs targeted at the homeowner market increasing almost exponentially, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the breadth of choices available on the shelves of even modestly stocked computer software stores.

Programs aimed at homeowners range from the simple and inexpensive to those that are costly and highly sophisticated. And while there are some software gems available for as little as \$9.99, in most cases, increasing sophistication means higher price tags that can go to hundreds of dollars.

Still, it is possible to find modestly priced software packages that have astonishing range, power and features. Some home landscaping programs, for example, allow the use of scanned-in photographs of the user's house as a background for landscape design, and then let the user "age" foliage, shrubbery and trees to provide an idea of what a landscape job would look like 5 or 10 years from now.

Some home improvement programs provide high-quality audio-visual explanations of household mechanical systems and concise demonstrations of many of the common maintenance and repair challenges a householder typically faces. A few home design programs allow even neophytes to design their own homes -- from professional-looking floor plans to detailed three-dimensional renderings that can be "walked through," "flown over" and even flipped upside down.

Some programs come with scores of choices of roofing and siding materials, some come with furniture and furnishing libraries and some even provide the ability to scan in your favorite wallpaper pattern so you can see what it will look like on the virtual walls of your virtual house in virtually no time at all.

"The technology available today is amazing," said Dr. Charles McIntyre, a professor of civil engineering at Penn State University in University Park, Pa. "There are, of course, limitations with all of these design packages. But for somebody

who wants to get up to speed fast and who doesn't want to spend thousands of dollars, there are some excellent programs out there."

Here, then, is an overview of some software packages available to homeowners, an amateur computer hacker's whirlwind tour of a broad assortment of home repair, decoration and design software.

"Tackle Every Job in Your Home with Ease," proclaims the blurb on Reader's Digest's Complete Do-It-Yourself Guide, a software program developed in collaboration with the Microsoft Corporation.

The program, essentially an audio-visual version of the Reader's Digest book of the same name, covers nearly 1,000 home repair topics, many of which will be confronted by homeowners. Like the book that inspired it, the Do-It-Yourself Guide covers basic concepts of how houses work, maintenance and repair, materials and tools and the techniques and skills needed to use them.

Unlike the book, however, the computer program includes sound and video clips and narrated animations to make even complicated repair and maintenance procedures clear and entertaining. It also includes various guided tours (accompanied by a catchy blues guitar) to start you on your way.

Like most of the programs described in this article, the Do-It-Yourself Guide needs a relatively capable computer system that meets some minimum system requirements. The programs discussed in this article come on CD-ROM, mainly because their usefulness is often dependent on their ability to provide information in audio-visual format. A double-speed drive is a minimum requirement -- and faster drives make it easier to install some of the heftier, disk-hungry programs.

The Do-It-Yourself Guide needs a PC with a 486/33 or higher processor and 8 megabytes of RAM to run properly. The program also needs 10 megabytes of hard-disk space, a sound board (used to play dialogue and music clips), a mouse and an SVGA monitor capable of displaying 256 colors. And while the Reader's Digest program is designed for PC's running Windows 95, most programs also run in Windows 3.1, and some run on both PC's and Macintosh computers.

(It is critical to check the box for the minimum system requirements of each software package before buying. Some of the more sophisticated 3D programs, for example, run best on a fast Pentium machine and can be agonizingly slow on less brawny computers. Most stores do not allow refunds for opened software.)

Another home repair program that comes in a package that might seem vaguely familiar to weekend woodworkers is Multicom Publishing's Home Improvement 1-2-3, a program produced in conjunction with Home Depot, the home improvement superstore chain.

The program contains step-by-step instructions for more than 250 do-it-yourself home repair projects and includes more than 2,200 full-color illustrations and 50 narrated videos.

Books That Work, a California-based software publisher, produces a home-improvement software package called the Home Improvement Encyclopedia 3.0, along with a variety of other user-friendly programs aimed at homeowners.

Like other developers of home improvement programs, Books That Work provides explanations and instructions for most do-it-yourself projects using videos, animations and photographs to provide step-by-step instructions. In addition, however, Books That Work also provides Netscape Navigator 2.0 software with most of its home improvement packages so that those with access to the Internet can access the company's site on the World Wide Web.

Two other items that might be of interest to homeowners are 3D Kitchen and 3D Deck, also published by Books That Work. The 3D Kitchen program allows users to redesign their kitchens from scratch by creating a layout and then dragging and dropping cabinets, appliances, countertops and furniture into their new design. The 3D Deck program, on the other hand, provides basic deck design and construction techniques and then provides viewable 3D renditions of the designer's artistry.

New Room Looks And Trees That Age

For those more interested in dealing with the esthetic details of a home than its mechanics, several programs are available that can occupy hour after hour of an amateur decorator's leisure time.

Better Homes and Gardens Magazine, for example, produces two such programs in collaboration with Multicom Publishing. "Remodeling Your Home" and "Decorating Your Home, Getting Started" both provide virtual tours of nicely appointed homes, such as those found on the pages of the magazine itself. In fact, both programs are more like audio-visual magazines than interactive computer programs. Still, there are scores of decorating tips and articles to be found in both packages, along with user-friendly explanations of why some decorating ideas work better than others.

One place where multimedia software can truly flex its electronic muscle is in the area of **landscape design**.

Books That Work, for example, publishes Garden Encyclopedia, a software package that contains pictures and information on more than 1,500 varieties of plants along with audio-visual clips on selecting and caring for plants and trees.

Sierra Land Designer, a product of Sierra On-Line Inc., is an even more sophisticated program that helps homeowners **landscape** their properties from scratch. The program provides users with a 12-layer process of design that includes discussions on topics such as site analysis, soil types and site planning. The program also contains illustrations and information on more than 2,000 plants and a sprinkler system design component that permits homeowners to design their own underground sprinkler layout.

One of the most sophisticated yet user-friendly **landscape** design programs is Planix Photo **Landscape** by Softdesk Inc.

"We are talking about a very powerful program here," said Dr. McIntyre of Penn State University. Dr. McIntyre, who offers training workshops in computer design programs to homebuilders, said that Photo **Landscape** is the one **landscape** design program that he teaches in those workshops.

"When I show them what the program can do, they're usually amazed," he said, explaining that photographs of specific homes can be scanned into the program and then used as the model around which the **landscaping** design takes shape.

"You can bring your own house right into the program and then put in walks and lawns and trees and what-not," Dr. McIntyre said. "Then you can even age the design to see what it's going to look like 2 or 5 or 10 years from now."

When the program first starts the user is confronted with an intimidating blank white screen with a small toolbar off to one corner. And while it is easy enough to fiddle around with the sample designs that come with the program (by clicking File, Open and then Demo) it is much more enlightening and far more entertaining to run one of the dozen or so highly detailed audio-visual tutorials that are included on the CD-ROM.

Unlike most other **landscaping** programs that use drawn or painted representations of the plants, shrubs and trees used to create exterior designs, Planix Photo **Landscape** uses actual photographs that can be positioned by "dragging and dropping" the image and then adjusting its size to proper scale. The program can even adjust lighting levels so you can see what your design will look like at dusk or with artificial lighting.

Michele Pingle, a spokeswoman for Softdesk, the program's publisher, said that Planix Photo **Landscape** can also be used by homeowners who want to try out different color schemes on their home's exterior. By scanning in a photograph of the home, Ms. Pingle said, homeowners can then "paint" the exterior any color they want.

"You can even use it to try out different kinds of roofs on the house," she said, explaining that once a texture, color or material has been scanned into the program, it can then be applied to any surface.

Other **landscape** design programs currently available include **Landscape** Architect from the Learning Company; Key Cad **Landscape** from the Learning Company; and **Landscape** Design 3D, a \$14.95 program from Expert Software that

contains about 30 minutes of gardening and **landscaping** instructional videos, as well as **3D design tools** that allow budding **landscape** designers to walk through and even helicopter over their new designs.

In fact, Expert Software has carved out a niche for itself by producing several low-cost, high-quality, relatively sophisticated software programs.

"Cost doesn't always determine what a design program can do," said Walter Sedovic, an Irvington, N.Y., architect who specializes in the restoration of landmark buildings. "Some of the less expensive programs are really very good and don't cost much more than a bunch of pads and marking pens."

Home Design From Blueprints To Materials Lists

For most professionals, Mr. Sedovic said, nothing less than a professional-level computer aided design program will suffice. Such programs -- which can cost thousands of dollars and take months to learn -- enable architects and designers to plan and engineer complex structural elements of large commercial and residential buildings.

Homeowners, however, can often produce original, interesting home designs -- or designs for additions or remodeling -- with far less expensive and far more user-friendly computer-aided design programs than the programs professionals use.

"A homeowner can use these programs to explore options and play around with designs in a way they wouldn't be able to do with paper and pencil," Mr. Sedovic said. "I don't believe they can take the place of the communication that goes on between a professional architect and a building owner, but they are probably a good tool for people to begin to graphically describe what they want."

In fact, that is exactly what Mr. Dover wanted to do when he set about designing a house for a four-acre parcel of land he and his wife recently purchased in Katonah, N.Y.

"In the beginning, this was just another game to play with the computer," Mr. Dover said, referring to the 3D Home Architect computer-aided design program from Broderbund that he bought after closing on his Katonah property. "But things started to become interesting when we found out we could really design a house on our computer." Mr. Dover said that using floor plans found in design books as a starting point, he and his wife were able to tinker with various designs and arrangements until they reached agreement on each aspect of their new home. They ended up with a 2,500-square-foot colonial with three bedrooms, an open floor plan and "lots of windows."

"When we finally nailed it down, we took it to our architect, and he didn't have to change anything in the layout," Mr. Dover said. "But people should realize that, in New York, you can't get approvals to build a house using a set of plans from your home computer."

Mr. Dover is correct. "According to the building code, if you're doing any structural work, the plans have to be stamped by a registered architect or licensed engineer," said Ilyse Fink, a spokeswoman for the New York City Department of Buildings. "If an architect or engineer stamps plans that a homeowner has drawn, then the architect or engineer is taking responsibility for the plan. Basically, what matters to us is that everything is done according to code."

In New Jersey, on the other hand, owners of single-family homes do not necessarily need an architect's involvement to build a house for their own use.

"The law says that if a homeowner can demonstrate that he knows what he's doing, and it's a one-family house, we can release the permits," said Louis Scala, Construction Official in North Bergen, N.J. "If the plans somebody draws on their computer are good and they're accurate, I don't have any problem with that. If you know what you're doing, and you do it right, you can even build your own house if you want to."

Mr. Scala added, however, that most Construction Officials "give a little quiz" to homeowners who walk in the office with homemade plans.

So what's out there for design do-it-yourselfers? Plenty, it seems.

The 3D Home Architect program that Mr. Dover used employs an "object oriented" approach to layout design. And that, said Mike Salvadore, a spokesman for Broderbund, makes the program much easier for homeowners to use than traditional computer aided design -- or CAD -- programs.

"Our whole purpose was to design a product for the ordinary consumer," Mr. Salvadore said, explaining that the object-oriented approach allows homeowners to drag and drop complex objects -- like walls, doors, windows and even furnishings -- directly into a layout without having to sit down and draw the object first. Most professional CAD programs, he said, require the construction of such objects out of simple lines, arcs and geometric shapes.

For example, once an exterior wall has been placed in a layout, it is a simple matter of dragging and dropping a window at the spot on the wall where the window is to be situated. The program itself then "inserts" the window into the wall at just the right height.

That, however, is only the beginning of what home design programs like 3D Home Architect can do. For example, as its name implies, at any point in the design of a layout, the structure can be viewed in three dimensions, from different angles and at different magnifications. The software also contains an Automatic Roof Designer that automatically calculates and constructs even complex roof designs. And, once the plan is completed, the program will generate a materials list that can be used to calculate the quantity and cost of nearly every element of the design.

Another sophisticated home design program is Floor Plan Plus 3D from IMSI. The program allows for design from scratch and also includes 1,001 floor plans that can be used as a starting point for a design. In addition, the program contains 500 three-dimensional furniture and fixture symbols, a roof designer, automatic wall dimensioning, 360-degree three-dimensional viewing and the ability to import and export files from and to the CAD format so that an architect or engineer with a CAD program can use the homeowner's plans if desired.

Books That Work also offers a 3D design program called Visual Home.

Sin-Yaw Wang, vice president of product development for the company, said that the most user-friendly features of the program are its Quick Design Wizard, which takes users step by step through the process of creating a layout, and its Room Blocks feature, which lets users add, move and decorate an entire room as a single unit.

"We also use smart object technology," Mr. Wang said. "That means that if you put a vase on a table and then later, you decide to move the table, the vase moves with it."

Visual Home also provides automatic Internet links to manufacturers of the more than 3,000 furnishings and materials that are used to build and decorate a design.

"If you click on the Sony TV you put in the living room, it connects you to the Sony website," Mr. Wang said, adding, of course, that a modem and an Internet service provider would be necessary to take advantage of such a function.

Other high-tech home design programs include the Learning Company's My House 3.0 by Design Ware, which allows users to create a 3D layout, walk through the layout, record their movements and then play back their tour as often as they wish. Softdesk Software, publishers of Planix Photo **Landscape**, also publishes Planix Home Design Suite 3D, which allows users to take and record video tours of their designs. The Home Design Suite also supplies real wallpaper patterns from Wallpapers-to-Go, a wallpaper retailer, and over 100 windows and doors manufactured by Pella.

And finally, for real purists who want to literally design their homes from scratch, there are several CAD programs that can be used by real people without months of intense training.

Those offerings include the Learning Company's Key Cad Pro, Softdesk's Drafix CAD Professional for Windows 95, Turbo Cad from IMSI, Smart CAD from Digital Systems Research and Wiz Technologies and, of course, for \$14.95, Expert Software's Quick & Easy CAD, whose packaging proudly points out:

"You don't have to be a professional architect or engineer to use a CAD program!"

The Programs and the Companies

Here is a list of products, prices, manufacturers, telephone numbers and website addresses.

Complete Home Designer, \$59.95. Alpha Software (617) 229-2924.

Internet: www.alphasoftware.com

3D Deck, \$50; 3D Kitchen, \$50.; 3D **Landscape**, \$60; Garden Encyclopedia, \$30; Home Improvement Encyclopedia, \$30; Visual Home, \$60. Books That Work (415) 326-4280.

Internet: www.btw.com.

3D Home Architect, \$70. Broderbund Software Inc. (415) 382-4400.

Internet: www.broderbund.com.

Landscape Design 3D, \$14.95. Quick and Easy CAD, \$14.95. Expert Software (305) 567-9990.

Internet: www.expertsoftware.com.

Floor Plan Plus 3D, \$39.95, Turbo CAD, \$99.95. IMSI (415) 257-3000.

Internet: www.imsisoft.com.

The Reader's Digest Complete Do-It-Yourself Guide, \$39.96. The Reader's Digest Association (800) 213-8900.

Internet: www.readersdigest.com.

Decorating Your Home, Getting Started, \$26.95. Home Improvement 1-2-3, \$26.95. Remodeling Your Home, \$26.95. Multicom Publishing (415) 777-4729.

Internet: www.multicom.com.

Land Designer, \$59.95. Sierra On-Line (206) 649-9800. Internet: www.sierra.com.

Drafix CAD Professional, \$695. Planix Home Design Suite 3D, \$129. Planix Photo **Landscape**, \$119. Softdesk Retail Products (816) 891-1040.

Internet: www.softdesk.com.

Key Cad Pro, \$39.95. **Landscape Architect**, \$49.95. My House, \$49.95. The Learning Company (800) 227-5609.

Internet: www.learningco.com.

Smart CAD, \$9.99. Wiz Technology Inc. (714) 443-3000.

Internet: www.wiztech.com.

GRAPHIC: Photos: Some of the computer programs available for homeowners include **Landscape Design 3D** (left), a program that includes tools that allow users to walk through and helicopter over their **landscapes**; **Drafix CAD Professional** (below), for computer-aided home design, and **Visual Home** (below left), which lets users add, move and decorate a room. (Naum Kazdhan/The New York Times Studio) (pg. 1); **Planix Photo Landscape** permits scanning a photo of a house into the program and using it to help shape **landscape** design. (pg. 6)